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### Love and Disease : the Humanism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Love in the Time of Cholera

Alan Sheardown  
*Edith Cowan University*

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Honours Thesis

**Love and Disease**  
**The Humanism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's**  
*Love in the Time of Cholera*

By: Alan Sheardown  
Faculty of Arts (English Studies)

Supervisor: Dr Jill Durey  
Submission: 2 September 1997

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## **Love and Disease: the Humanism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*.**

### **Introduction**

In his discussion of the inadequacies of postmodernism, Eagleton suggests that contemporary theory's inability to tackle this cultural dominant is primarily due to the "current limits of language - which is of course to say the current limits of our political world" (1996: 92). Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, I will argue, reasserts the possibility of renegotiating these limitations by positing an alternative methodology which exposes some of the fallacies of a postmodern view of the 'world', and provides a model that reaffirms the subject's ability to make meaning. Garcia Marquez achieves this through an allegorical portrayal of the principal male protagonists, Dr Juvenal Urbino and Florentino Ariza, who represent two distinct modes of interaction with the world, and their differing abilities to negotiate 'love' with Fermina Daza. He does not propose, then, a new way of writing that transcends the 'meaninglessness' of the world, but rather forces the reader to acknowledge an alternative way of understanding this 'reality'.

While Garcia Marquez portrays both Urbino and Florentino quite separately in the novel, leaving them to act dialogically across the canvas of a turbulent society, it is Urbino who is often read as the hero of *Love in the Time of Cholera*. I contend, however, that Urbino demonstrates a real failure to effectively negotiate this world. Representing the official, dominant ideology, he attempts to impose a rational order onto a disordered and discontinuous society so that meaning can be validated. Urbino is

vertically hierarchised and 'centred' by science and the church, and this privileging of the mind and the spiritual over the corporeal makes Urbino an exemplary Cartesian subject. This world-view, which has crystallised around a binary understanding of the world, means that the rational subject can promote only stasis and hermeticism so as to maintain the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture, 'upper' and 'lower' stratum, and 'self' and 'other'. The inadequacies of this philosophy are evident in Urbino's inability to effect meaning with the other, and most notably by his struggle to build and achieve love with Fermina, despite their marriage of fifty years.

The inadequacies of this Cartesian, subject-centred understanding of the world have largely been exposed by postmodernism's suspicion of meaning-making. But postmodernism, itself predicated in this discourse of European reason, fails to explain the world satisfactorily, due to the constraints of its own subjectivity. Habermas (1985: 590) traces postmodernism's subjectivity to Kant, whose "subjectivist tendency" is itself, Russell notes (1946: 677), firmly rooted in Descartes. Buehrer's (1990: 16) suggestion, then, that society in the novel is a metaphor for the cultural anaesthesia of postmodernism, is valid when seen through the projection of the Doctor's rationalism. Indeed, within this philosophical perspective, the fragmented nature of the world can, logically, be nothing but apocalyptic, or postmodern. Consequently, Urbino is a figure of some irony in the novel, clumsily attempting to negotiate 'rational' meaning in a meaningless world, but constrained by the very subject-centred discourse which he initiated.

In the figure of Florentino, Garcia Marquez provides an alternative world-view that acknowledges this 'reality' of discontinuity and meaninglessness, and yet recognises



that meaning is nevertheless made. This is a possibility not available within the discourse of postmodernism. The potential for subject agency and the creation of meaning when not constrained within this discourse represents, I contend, a humanism most clearly explained by Mikhail Bakhtin in his early essay, 'Art and Answerability' (1990), and further developed in his book on the carnivalesque, *Rabelais and His World* (1984). But this humanism is not reliant on logocentric structures or an individual essentialism. Indeed, Bakhtin's distrust of metaphysics and grand narratives largely concurs with a postmodern understanding of the world.

As Clark and Holquist note, for Bakhtin the "world in essence is without meaning" (1984: 75), but where this, for postmodernism, suggests, by logical rationalist abstraction, the futility of attempting to make meaning, Bakhtin asserts that meaning-making is unavoidable. Indeed, Clark and Holquist continue, "[p]eople in essence are nothing but creators and consumers of meaning. The world and people interact in a mutuality of passive need for and active giving of value" (1984: 75). Bakhtin's belief in the ability of interlocutors to consummate this mutual need for value stems from a philosophical position that, unlike postmodernism, recognises the interactive, or dialogic, nature of communication.

Like Saussure, Bakhtin agrees that language is not founded on an absolute logos. Since we can never completely share a perception or view of the world with an 'other', so a word or signifier can never be understood *completely* by an 'other'. This could only occur with the complete dissolution of the self/other dichotomy, and, as Bakhtin suggests, "to annihilate this difference completely, it would be necessary to merge into one, to become one and the same person" (1990: 23). The utterance or 'word' that

attempts to bridge this gap, then, between the individual consciousness and the other, will be an intersection of at least two perspectives. It is, as Voloshinov describes, "*the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*" (1986: 130: author's italics). Thus, the meaning of every word or social interaction of any kind will be, at the very least, implicitly dyadic.

Similarly, for Bakhtin, the subject is also a social product, for it relies on the 'other' to define itself; there can be no 'I' without the recognition of the 'not-I'. He suggests that to concentrate on the individual, separate from the world, is to deny the "human being's absolute need for the other .... [the] outward personality could not exist, if the other did not create it" (1990: 35-6). The subject only exists dialogically:

content ... and form are unjustified and unexplainable on the plane of a single consciousness; ... it is only on the boundaries of two consciousnesses, on the boundaries of the body, that an encounter is actually realized and the artistic gift of form is bestowed. (1990: 96-7).

Understanding is further problematised by the knowledge that, when looking inwardly, the individual understands that his/her consciousness is unfinished and incomplete. Knowing that our inner self is forever in a state of becoming, we also understand that this must also be the case for the other. To overcome the inherent uncertainty involved in communication between such unfinished consciousnesses, Bakhtin explains, "we evaluate ourselves from the standpoint of others, and through others we try to understand and take into account what is transgredient to our own consciousness" (1990: 17). Bakhtin recognises that this is a situation that can never be achieved completely: "Strictly speaking, a pure projection of myself into the other, a move

involving the loss of my own unique place outside the other, is, on the whole, hardly possible; in any event, it is quite fruitless and senseless" (1990: 26). It is, rather, a desired state for language users.

Bakhtin's recognition of social interaction's lack of foundation or logos pre-empts the Derridean assertion that "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse ... that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside of a system of differences" (1966: 151-2). But whereas Derrida suggests that the "absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and play of signification infinitely" (1966: 152), Bakhtin sees 'meaning' limited by this 'transgredient empathy' for the other. So, while the meaning of any social construct will be in constant flux, as it is negotiated and re-negotiated in this unstable environment, by endeavouring to share the spatio-temporal horizon of the interlocutor, meaning is confined and does not dissipate away in a spiral of infinite deferral.

This dialogic understanding of meaning-making contrasts markedly with postmodernism's subjectivity. Habermas (1985: 590) suggests that philosophers such as Heidegger and Derrida stood at crossroads, before the alternative paths of 'subject-centred' reason and 'communicative' reason. Postmodernism's subsequent suspicion of meaning-making stems from its choosing the former. He suggests that, by "ascribing the meaning-creating horizons of world interpretation ... to a Dasein heroically projecting itself or to a background occurrence that shapes structures", postmodernism fails to recognise that language consists rather of "communicatively structured lifeworlds that reproduce themselves via the palpable medium of action oriented to mutual

agreement" (1985: 591). Bakhtin's emphasis on the inherent necessity of the other reflects this 'communicative' approach, and it is this addressivity that explains how communication is achieved, and how the potentially debilitating concept of understanding that results from a 'subject-centred' reason, such as Derrida's, is overcome.

Florentino's implicit acceptance of the world as dyadic and relative reflects this Bakhtinian dialogic understanding of reality, an understanding that is particularly evident in Bakhtin's writings on the carnival. Whereas Habermas' discussion of communicative-reasoning is restricted to the utterance, perpetuating postmodernism's limitations, Bakhtin, through the carnivalesque, extends dialogism to explain the interactive nature of society as a whole, as well as reasserting the role of the body and the external in the creation of meaning. This recognition of the heterogenous and heteroglossic nature of the world, with its conflicting forces and perspectives, accommodates the deconstructive potential evident in post-structuralism, retaining, what Eagleton admits, are postmodernism's admirable features; that is, its ability to dislodge "virulent ideologies", to speak "to the situation of the gagged and anonymous, and ... to discern power in powerlessness" (1996: 90-1).

But, unlike postmodernism, Bakhtin's recognition of the heteroglossic nature of reality does not diminish the ability for meaning to be made. The carnival provides a time and space where the conventions of official society, which inhibit the individual's ability to effectively achieve this 'empathic transgression' of the other, are stripped away and exposed. Bakhtin's carnivalesque methodology, then, provides the tools to explain how communication is made so that the subject may achieve agency in this reality of

relativity. As a social phenomenon and a literary topos, then, the carnivalesque is particularly important for a reading of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, as it is in the de-hierarchised carnival space, and through the grotesque body, that Florentino is able to open to and more easily engage, physically and intellectually, with the external.

Garcia Marquez completes this philosophical shift of emphasis to the earthly by linking 'love' in the novel, with disease, where Florentino's grotesque openness to the world enables him to fulfil a vow of eternal love made to Fermina some fifty years before. McNerney's suggestion, then, that Florentino's approach to Fermina and love is "pure romanticism" (in McNiff & Burrell: 1990-1: 57) not only ignores the marked change in Florentino, but also misunderstands the earthy nature of love/disease in the novel. His ability to generate meaning, in an otherwise meaningless world, suggests that society in the novel is not a metaphor for postmodernism, as it is for the subject-centred Doctor, but an ambivalent reality which the decentred subject can humanistically negotiate.

Garcia Marquez's novel could be seen, then, to stand as a response to assertions by such writers as John Barth (1980: 71), that he is the archetypal postmodern writer. Published almost two decades after *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it attempts to move beyond the discourse of fatalism and futility that the term postmodernism often implies, and demonstrate how meaning is generated or achieved. Garcia Marquez shows how the individual can, if not transcend his/her surroundings, then at least exist with agency within them. It is a humanism not founded on a modernist presumption of depth, or on the individual of ideal or Romantic humanism, where the individual exists outside of, or beyond, the world. Rather, it is a humanism that turns away from the individualism of European-style rationalism and emphasises, as Eagleton describes, "the sovereignty of

the human as opposed to the divine or supernatural” (1996: 129). Free of the subject-centred discourse epitomised by Doctor Urbino, Florentino succeeds, not despite the apocalyptic social, but largely due to his ability to engage personally with this fragmentation *as* reality.

Garcia Marquez is able, then, to continue the postmodern tradition of undermining hegemonies and structures of knowledge, while demonstrating how the grotesque subject, nevertheless, generates meaning within this debierarchised world. It is a humanistic achievement symbolically represented by Florentino and Fermina achieving ‘love’ after fifty years of estrangement, during which Fermina’s attempts to create this love, within the discourses of Urbino, largely fail. This thesis will demonstrate, then, the workable methodology that Bakhtin’s theories offer in an analysis of this novel. In contrast, postmodernism, restricted by its subject-centredness, fails to adequately elucidate the possibilities inherent within Garcia Marquez’s work.

## Chapter One - *The carnival ambivalence as 'reality'.*

In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Garcia Marquez presents two modes of understanding the world, alternatives that are allegorically demonstrated by the two principal male protagonists in the novel, Dr Urbino and Florentino Ariza, both suitors for the love of Fermina Daza. The Doctor represents a European subject-centred reason that attempts to render this disordered and formless society to an image of rationalism and order. Garcia Marquez contrasts this philosophical position with Florentino's carnivalesque world-view that sees the 'reality' of the world as disordered. These differences in perspective engender distinctly different possibilities for each subject. Where the Doctor's rationalism imposes a *Gestalt* to which 'reality' must conform so that meaning is validated, Florentino achieves meaning through an interaction which negotiates this relativity.

In his article, 'On "Magical" and Social Realism in Garcia Marquez', Martin suggests that Garcia Marquez's earlier novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, only appears unreal because the world, for South Americans, *is* "magical" and "dream-like" when compared to the image of life implied by European culture:

The official history which Europe has projected is that of rationalism, capitalism, progressive development and linear chronology. However contradictory and repressive this may seem to any European, it is, for the typical Latin American, organic and coherent by definition; whereas his own history is fragmented, discontinuous, absurd ... (1987: 104).

In this later novel, Garcia Marquez repeatedly presents this reality of discontinuity and

absurdity as a backdrop against which he portrays the concurrent life-stories of the rival suitors. For the Doctor, who continues to project this rationalist *Gestalt* onto the world, this disorder engenders only dismay and horror. For Florentino, this fragmented and 'as-yet-formed' image of the world *is* reality, and he negotiates it accordingly. By contrasting their abilities to negotiate this reality, Garcia Marquez highlights, I contend, the short-comings of the Doctor's European subject-centred rationalism, when compared with Florentino's carnivalesque philosophic mode.

Bakhtin's carnivalesque recognition of the world as ever-becoming accommodates the subversive elements of postmodernism, as well as offering possibilities inherently not achievable within postmodernism. While undermining official ideology, the carnival simultaneously provides the dehierarchised space and time in which subjects can most effectively communicate. It is, Bakhtin explains, the "second life of the people, ... the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (1984: 9). It does not attempt to impose a truth or *Gestalt* onto the world. Rather, the communal immortality of the carnival provides a liberation from the weight of hell and the uncertainty of life beyond death, allowing revellers to share and exist within a space, without footlights, where individuals merge and mix, and the hierarchical traditions that maintain power are abandoned. Conventions and hierarchies evident in the official, normative ideology are suspended, overturned and parodied.

In the novel, this 'reality' of disorder is shown to exist beneath only a thin veneer of control imposed by the rigid ideology of the Doctor, and this subversive potential is exposed at a feast in honour of one of his former pupils. Bakhtin asserts that the image of the banquet, as derived from folklore, promotes an encompassing, non-hierarchical,



"free atmosphere" (1984: 291). This feast, attended only by the aristocratic families of the city, the archbishop, and government officials, with the tables being organised to reflect the social positions of the guests, is a highly formalised, official affair which travesties the banquet form by its hierarchisation and exclusivity. In such an appropriation, Bakhtin states, "there inevitably arises an inner contradiction and tension" (1984: 291) between the usual market-place frankness of speech and mixing of classes, and the official attempts to maintain artificial order. The formality of this event is ruptured by a sudden storm which throws the event into disarray, with "the name cards ... in an obligatory promiscuity that defied ... social superstitions" (*Love*: 34). The discomfort suffered by the guests as a result of this carnivalesque debasement symbolises the inner contradictions inherent within the Doctor's formalised, official culture, as well as exposing the tenuous nature of this repression.

Garcia Marquez's use of the word 'promiscuity' inherently acknowledges the carnivalesque nature underlying the banquet, and the extent to which official society attempts to repress and control its radical potential. While Bakhtin is careful to acknowledge that a simplified application of this notion risks over-looking the "struggles and opposed tendencies" (1984: 291) that may be present, the very formality of the occasion, with its strict organisation of relations between participants, betrays its Bakhtinian 'hidden polemic'. Every image for Bakhtin is ambivalent, that is, as in post-structuralism, it is always aware of, and indeed constituted by its inherent 'other'.

For Bakhtin, Wilson points out that, "there is no official expression without a prior official one or its possibility. Hence in Bakhtin's analysis of the carnival, the official and un-official are locked together" (in Stallybrass & White: 1986: 16). The

authoritarian command of the official responds to the 'as-yet-asked-for' permission, dialogically pre-empting any resistance or uncertainty as to the interlocutor's possible actions. Similarly, ideology, as a social product, inherently comprises its other. Any ideology (repressive or co-optive) is a coercive force designed toward a normative view of society, but it also implicitly recognises its other, heterogeneity and chaos. In this sense the discourse of authority always already contains within it the seed of its own alterity, recognising and implicitly acknowledging the ambivalence it attempts to circumscribe. The more rigid and fixed authority becomes, as in the official culture of Urbino's society, the more overtly it recognises its repressed, un-official other as dynamic, encompassing and unfinished. In the above example, it acknowledges the constructedness of a society that must be vigilant to avoid free fraternisation between hierarchies for fear that this will result in a breakdown in social strata. This carnivalesque tendency to destabilise hierarchies demonstrates a resemblance to J. Hillis Miller's 'deconstructionist' aversion to hermeneutic 'mastery' (1980: 191).

Bakhtin's recognition of the inherent duality of the social addresses Lyotard's concerns about legitimation (1984). Like the postmodernists, he is suspicious of structures of knowledge such as Urbino's official society, but, where postmodernism, as the extreme end of Cartesian subjectivism, highlights and emphasises the binary nature of the world, Bakhtin, while recognising this difference, encompasses this duality. He offers as other, not another ideology, but ambivalence, an ambivalence that encompasses the official world-view as one aspect of a heteroglot reality. Carnival logic is not restricted to the structuralist limitations of binary oppositions, but is equivalent to the power of continuum; not 'either/or', but 'also/and'. This ambivalence recognises that the world is never complete.

The carnival image, Bakhtin asserts, "is deeply ambivalent, being intimately related to life-death-birth" (1984: 149). It encompasses both aspects of the binary, breaking down the distinctions between high and low culture, upper and lower bodily strata; containing both the tradition-bound past and a utopian vision of the future. The individual is galvanised within a communalism that exposes the constructedness of the world and makes nonsense of hierarchies and pomposity. But, most importantly in this discussion of humanistic potential, the carnivalesque also offers the possibility of positive regeneration. This distinction, between the possibilities available within the Doctor's subject-centred approach to the binary nature of the world and Florentino's carnivalesque approach, are allegorically demonstrated in the novel.

The Doctor, representing official culture, epitomises what Bakhtin sees expressed in Descartes' "rationalist philosophy and in the aesthetics of classicism." He describes the Cartesian aesthetic as "authoritarian and serious .... [with] a tendency toward stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness" (1984: 101), and contrasts with the gay relativity of the culture it superseded which recognised the inherently ambivalent nature of the world. The seriousness engendered by the ecclesiastical feudalism, from which Cartesianism grew, similarly affects the Doctor, who is burdened and constrained by the cosmic "terror of not finding God in the darkness of death" (*Love*: 41).

His adherence to the discourses of metaphysical or religious truth, and of medicine and science, engenders an empirical, deterministic view of the world. And this view inherently requires a world that remains static and complete so that these truth concepts

remain valid. The Doctor himself describes the world-view that results from the conflation of these rationalist and scriptural discourses, with its emphasis on the after-life over the earthly, as a "fatalistic humanism": "Each man is master of his own death, and all that we can do when the time comes is to help him die without fear of pain" (*Love*: 10). Since, for the Doctor, death is pre-determined by the body's mechanistic nature, and the soul lies within God's jurisdiction, life is reduced to an inevitablism that encourages only endurance and stasis in earthly life, and attempts to deny the reality of instability and change occurring around him. He is increasingly intent only on surviving, soul intact, until his expected liberation into heaven, and is wary of jeopardising this in a world of disease and love.

Subsequently, despite his self-professed, "almost maniacal love for the city and a knowledge of it superior to anyone's" (*Love*: 12), Urbino is shown to be somewhat exclusive in his experience of the world. Maintaining a distance between himself and the world that is aesthetically typical of the 'classic' self, the Doctor takes a position above the streets, where he can look and administer down onto the people. It is an attitude epitomised by his maintaining a Victorian carriage and horse, and requiring the driver to wear velvet livery and top hat. The carriage provides Urbino with the adequate privacy and distance from the people walking the streets, and symbolically demonstrates his intent on maintaining tradition.

Inhibited by his bourgeois sensibilities, the reality of Urbino's feelings is exposed when the narrator describes him "ventur[ing] boldly into the tumult" (*Love*: 12) of the old slave quarter. This mockery implicit within this comment is further exposed when he refuses to alight until he is sure that the coachman has found the correct building. This

anti-carnavalesque refusal to engage and interact with the other ensures that the oppositions, such as high and low culture, mind and body, upper and lower stratum, are reinforced. His 'love' for the city can only occur from a distance and height, and cannot bridge the gap between the self and the world. But, perhaps more significantly, Urbino not only reinforces these binary oppositions, but resists acknowledging the physical aspect of the dualities. Consequently, he fails to recognise the power of reinvigoration and regeneration that the corporeal provides.

The Doctor does witness the carnival life and vitality that emanates from the poor quarters, but is unable or unwilling to accept this as valid as it fails to match the rational *Gestalt* to which life must accord. Constrained by the Cartesian and religious discourses within which he is educated, he cannot appreciate the reality of gay ambivalence around him. When the narrator notes that "out of the sordid taverns came the thunder of riotous music, the godless drunken celebration of Pentecost by the poor", an exemplary carnival scene, the Doctor sees only that "[e]verything looked wretched and desolate" (*Love*: 12-3). The inadequacies of a world-view that is unable to acknowledge sordidness, are pointedly highlighted when Garcia Marquez portrays the normally lifeless aristocratic quarter overtaken by the uninhibited celebration of the poor, who "infused the dead city with the frenzy of a human fair reeking of fried fish: a new life" (*Love*: 17). The presence of the carnival crowd in the very space of the official is a destabilising and subversive gesture toward the official culture; but it is the regenerative, 'new life' aspect that is of particular significance.

Indeed, the Doctor's seriousness means that he is not only unable to see the potential for regeneration from death and decay, but must counter this apocalyptic vision and restore

the city. Restricted by his religion, Hippocratic duty, tradition, and social expectations, he can only set about reforming the city to a projection of his memory. But the memory, as the narrator notes, "eliminates the bad and magnifies the good, and that thanks to this artifice we manage to endure the burden of the past" (*Love*: 106). So, while being performed under a banner of 'progress', Urbino's actions are an anaphoric attempt to control change and impose a culture to match an illusion that has repressed, or ignored, the 'bad' aspect of the binary.

Urbino's attempts to reconstitute this past 'harmony' or form are enacted from the top down, pressing for reformation rather than renaissance. His rise to social prominence begins by his initiating rigorous quarantine laws along the coast and in the city to prevent a possible cholera epidemic. He further enhances civic hygiene by covering the sewers and instigating a covered market-place so that future outbreaks would be less likely. Urbino's desire to repress the 'sordidness' of the street also signifies a typically bourgeois, as traced by Stallybrass and White (1986: 145), attempt to repress low culture. The lower classes and the riotous culture of the streets, by this link with filth, cannot be tolerated or accepted and must be covered over or prevented.

This desire for cleanliness and hygiene extends beyond health aspects to a repression of any situation where 'sordidness' may be celebrated. The significance of his service to official culture is reflected in the official appointments he accrues. He is made President of both the Academy of Language and of History, a Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher for services to the church, and given the rank of Commander in the Legion of Honour by the French Government. His appointment to positions of importance in education, religion and the military ensures the ongoing legitimization of

these power structures in an attempt to ensure that society remains static so that the truths, upon which official society rely, remain true and valid.

Garcia Marquez demonstrates the implications of this stasis when the narrator notes that "the city, his city, stood unchanging on the edge of time ... where nothing had happened for four centuries except a slow ageing" (*Love*: 16). Permeated by the Doctor's voice, the comment expresses his position, mistakenly projecting the death of *his* city and *his* culture onto the broader, other-wise dynamic, society. In the quarter where Urbino grew up, in *his* city, life has stalled:

the great old families sank into their ruined palaces in silence .... and the only signs of life at two o'clock in the afternoon were languid piano exercises played in the dim light of siesta. Indoors, in the cool bedrooms saturated with incense, women protected themselves from the sun as if it were a shameful infection, and even at early Mass they hid their faces in their mantillas. Their love affairs were slow and difficult and were often disturbed by sinister omens, and life seemed interminable. (*Love*: 17).

Urbino's regret betrays a sad irony as the octogenarian doctor, just prior to his death, is still unable to see the reasons why his culture is dying, even though it is staring him in the face throughout the entire first chapter.

This fear of the world's ambivalence is reflected in official culture's attitude toward the temporal. Burdened by cosmic fear and empirical reality of individual mortality, the Doctor is rigid in his allocation of time. Indeed his "daily schedule was so methodical that his wife knew where to send him a message if an emergency arose in the course of the afternoon" (*Love*: 10). Fear of death and the uncertainty of the after-life restricts

Urbino's earthly life:

[it] had been inside him for many years, it had lived with him, it had been another shadow cast over his own shadow ever since the night he awoke, shaken by a bad dream, and realized that death was not only a permanent probability, as he had always believed, but an immediate reality. (*Love*: 31).

The constrictive nature of official time is experienced more oppressively by Fermina, as she waits for the suitable match expected of her by her father and the church.

Constrained by these patriarchal systems, she is "reduced to the cloister of a private life .... from the time she awoke at six in the morning until she turned out the light in the bedroom, Fermina Daza devoted herself to killing time. Life was *imposed* on her from outside" (*Love*: 130: my italics). This imposition by society from above demonstrates the vertically organised structure of time for official culture, and the seriousness it engenders. The resulting isolation also reinforces classical ideology's privileging of the private over the public. Living within this official *Gestalt* undermines the possibility of the individual existing with the 'gay relativity' granted by the freedom of communal immortality.

Florentino, significantly, lives within the ambivalence of the carnival. Growing up on the very streets that the Doctor attempts to cleanse, where the poor "danced without mercy, drank themselves blind on home-brewed alcohol, made wild love among the icaco plants ... broke up their own party with bloody free-for-alls" (*Love*: 17). His interest in (European) cultural forms such as the French Opera, instigated by the Doctor, is limited. Even the poetry competition interests him only because winning would offer him the chance to be near Fermina, who regularly announced the winners. These



European-style performances, authorised and staged, do not provide the inclusive, undifferentiated space without footlights, imperative in Bakhtin's conception of the liberating interaction of the carnivalesque. They are directed toward 'educating' the civic mind, and 'raising' the cultural standard 'upward'.

This is not the experience of Florentino, who moves from an individualism to an in-the-world, carnival position. His first experience with the carnival occurs as he leaves church after Midnight Mass. To this point Florentino considers himself to be an hermetic, solitary, Romantic creature, but, after making eye contact with Fermina during the service, he symbolically emerges from the church into the carnivalesque:

the din of fireworks and native drums, of colored lights in the doorways and the clamor of the crowd yearning for peace, Florentino Ariza wandered like a sleepwalker until dawn, watching the fiesta through his tears, dazed by the hallucination that it was he and not God who had been born that night. (*Love*: 59).

Florentino's (re)birth into the carnival world parodies the birth of Christ and undermines the church's sovereignty over morality and spirituality, particularly as his attendance is primarily motivated by the chance of seeing Fermina. Stepping out from the proscriptive, ecclesiastical darkness, he is freed into the crowd of the carnival, which dispels, Bakhtin suggests, "the atmosphere of gloomy and false seriousness enveloping the world and all its phenomena, to lend it a different look, to render it more material, closer to man and his body, more understandable, and lighter in the bodily sense" (1984: 380). From this point, Florentino shifts from the closed, Romantic figure, and is reborn into this carnivalised mode, which recognises the possibility of change and renewal.

According to Bakhtin, Rabelais "intentionally mixed the hierarchical levels in order to discover the core of the object's concrete reality, to free it from its shell and to show its material bodily aspect - the real being outside all hierarchical norms and values" (1984: 403). Garcia Marquez similarly exposes this commonality in the novel, situating Florentino in spaces devoid of social distinction and exclusivity, situations that manifest the encompassing, ambivalent spirit of the carnival:

the taverns around the port, which were frequented by everyone out for the evening regardless of social class, from drunken beggars to young gentlemen in tuxedos who fled the gala parties at the Social Club to eat fried mullet and coconut rice. (*Love*: 62).

Such a site encapsulates the non-hierarchised intermixing and the banquet abundance of the Bakhtinian carnival, and demonstrates the 'downward' social movement of the 'young gentlemen' from the Social Club to the tavern. In the carnival, participants become aware of their commonality rather than their socially constructed, outward difference, subversively exposing the ideological scaffolding, or 'shell', imposed onto an otherwise 'meaningless' world.

Even more dramatic in its dissolving of hierarchical norms is Florentino's time at the "transient hotel for sailors" (*Love*: 63). Garcia Marquez again subversively overturns the symbols of imperialism and the official by locating the brothel in a former colonial palace, but the establishment is more pertinent for its festive atmosphere. Although he does not indulge in the sexual activities of the brothel (as he refuses to pay for sex and is, anyway, yet fully to free himself of his Romantic vow to Fermina), Florentino is so readily accepted amongst the women that he comfortably and freely mingles with the prostitutes in this "paradise of nudity", celebrated each day before walking the streets:

It was a daily fiesta that lasted until dusk, when the naked women marched, singing, toward the bathrooms, asked to borrow soap, toothbrushes, scissors, cut each other's hair, dressed in borrowed clothes, painted themselves like lugubrious clowns, and went out to hunt the first prey of the night. (*Love*: 76).

It is in this naked, unmasked, carnivalesque space that Florentino "felt most at ease" (*Love*: 76), and where he is best able to experience an understanding of the other. Bataille suggests that "[n]akedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence ... It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self" (1962: 17-8). This dehierarchised carnival space, where the outward veneer of convention and class is stripped away, promotes a Bakhtinian empathy for the other which allows Florentino to effect understanding. His ability to bridge this binary difference with women is especially important, given Kristeva's suggestion (1986: 132) that woman is most distinctly 'other', as she is also man's other.

Florentino's empathic ability to step inside the spatio-temporal horizon of the feminine other, made possible through the carnivalesque, is symbolically complemented by his continuous need to read and write. It is suggested by a fellow brothel resident that he would become "a wise man known throughout the world because he could enrich his soul with reading in a paradise of salaciousness" (*Love*: 76). McNerney also notes the importance of this inclusiveness: "Florentino's love of reading and need to write are intricately related to his role as lover" (in McNiff & Burrell: 1990-91: 52). This wisdom, achieved by his exercising both the body *and* the mind, accords Florentino the ability to change, as we will see below, and ultimately regain the attentions of Fermina.

It is not attained through attention to the upper stratum alone, but is balanced by a carnivalesque interaction with the functions of the lower bodily stratum.

This freedom from the formalised restrictive structures of the official are reflected, as they were for Urbino, in Florentino's attitude toward the temporal. As Bakhtin states, the unified crowd of the carnival is "conscious of its uninterrupted continuity within time, of its relative historic immortality" (1984: 255-6). This re-orientation of time, from the hierarchical to the horizontal, acts subversively, presented along-side the seriousness of the Doctor's European culture of reason, but is also positive in that it allows Florentino to act free of the constrictions of the official attitudes to temporality.

With time no longer an axis of effect, the individual becomes part of the infinite continuity of the people, and thus a heteroglossic site in which co-exist the past, present and future simultaneously. This limited verticality produces a subject whose temporal ambivalence begets an intertextuality and depthlessness which, Jameson suggests, is the "supreme formal feature of all postmodernisms" (1991: 9). But whereas for postmodernism, with its distrust of paradigmatic narratives, the concomitant association of this surface-ness is an inability to make meaning, for Bakhtin, the horizontal nature of carnival time is a positive force, freeing the individual by undermining the notion of the temporal as a vertical concept.

Accordingly, Florentino, although once surprised by the thought that the Doctor might outlive him, "behaved as if time would not pass for him but only for others" (*Love*: 218). The worldly ramifications of this alternative outlook are, for Bakhtin, significant:

Not the ascent of the individual [classic] soul into the higher sphere but the

movement forward of all mankind, along the horizontal of historic time, becomes the basic criterion of all evaluations. Having done its part upon earth, the individual soul fades and dies together with the individual body; but the body of the people and of mankind, fertilized by the dead, is eternally renewed... (1984: 404).

This renewal is evident in Florentino's interaction with worldly ambivalence, not as something which must be controlled, as it is for the Doctor, but as reality, as a regenerative force to be negotiated. Even during the apocalyptic plague which besets the city, where "graves were dug deep enough to bury the dead on three levels ... [and] the brimming ground turned into a sponge that oozed sickening, infected blood at every step" (*Love*: 111), Florentino demonstrates that this image cannot be construed only as negative. Like every image, it contains an inherent positive, or regenerative, aspect, as is evidenced here by the proliferation of the rose-bushes which Florentino plants on the graves of his mother and a former lover:

Both bloomed in such profusion that Florentino had to bring shears and other gardening tools to keep them under control. But the task was beyond him: after a few years the two rosebushes had spread like weeds among the graves, and from then on the unadorned cemetery of the plague was called the Cemetery of Roses. (*Love*: 218).

Where, for official culture, death represents only escape from earthly existence or the empirical finality of life, for Florentino, this multitude of bodies buried in the earth represents potential new life from death. This awareness of the world's duality, then, does not restrict the carnivalesque to a parasitic, deconstructive tool, but rather, as

Bakhtin says, "offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things" (1984: 34). His struggle, as Holquist points out, is "to effect a whole out of the potential chaos of parts" (1990: xxiii), and is achieved by dissolving the conventions and structures that isolate individuals from their commonality.

Garcia Marquez clearly draws this distinction throughout the novel, between Urbino's attempts to impose mastery and certainty over the world, and Florentino's ability to negotiate this reality of ambivalence. Constituted by discourses that reinforce the Cartesian, subject-centred distinction between the self and the world, the Doctor's adherence to official linear temporality and spatial hierarchisation inhibit his ability to communicate with the other. Whereas Florentino, liberated from these conventions through a communicative, carnival engagement with the world, is able to generate new life from the amorphous 'reality' of the world, and can construct meaning through a carnival awareness of the inherently ambivalent nature of reality.

Thus, the apocalyptic state of society in the novel can be, as Buehrer (1990: 16) suggests, a metaphor for the cultural anaesthesia of postmodernism, but only when the world is viewed through a Cartesian projection of rationalism like the Doctor's. Within the language and political limits of European rationalism, the world's inherent duality can, theoretically, deliver only un-meaning, inevitablism and fatalism (Gitlin: 1988). But, as Martin notes, this discontinuity can also be viewed as society simply not conforming to a *Gestalt* that attempts to impose a coherent order upon a 'reality' of fragmentation and absurdity. Society is, then, only apocalyptically postmodern for those existing within the European discourse of reason that began with Descartes. For those

who do not acknowledge this rationalist position, society is not a metaphor for postmodernism, but the ever-evident reality of a discontinuous world. Subjects who must negotiate with, and make meaning within, this society choose, then, between continuing to impose 'rational' order, or accepting the discontinuity and absurdity of the world.

For proponents of rationalism, this imposition must be achieved completely for reason to legitimate itself, which requires the implementation of rigid structures that render the world's ambivalence so that meaning can be made. It is a situation which, postmodernism has demonstrated, is fallacious and hardly possible, and which is borne out in the novel as the Doctor's attempts to impose order onto the world are repeatedly undermined and mocked. The carnivalesque recognises the world's constant renewal and refusal to conform to a discursively prescribed *Gestalt*, whether it be traditional, ecclesiastical or philosophical. History as a social construct may have stopped but the world does not, as Bakhtin asserts, for it is an "uncompleted, changing world, filled with the disintegrating past and the as yet formed future" (1984: 127). Florentino recognises this when he suggests that "it is life, more than death, that has no limits" (*Love*: 348).

For those, like Florentino, who do not adhere to a view that the world is ordered so, meaning-making can again be returned to the realms of the achievable, as it is freed from these discursive constraints. Bakhtin's theoretical re-assertion of the world's regenerative possibility demonstrates that within a horizon of commonality and communality, where convention and hierarchy are stripped away, meaning can be generated between interlocutors. And, when the carnivalesque can be transcoded to the individual, physical level, communication will be further enhanced, according to

Bakhtin, by the grotesque.



## Chapter Two - *The grotesque body and the facilitation of meaning.*

The importance of the body as a mode of accessing the world is of particular concern in *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Not only do Florentino and Urbino inhabit the world differently both spatially and temporally, as we have seen above, but they also have radically different conceptions of the body's role in meaning-making. García Marquez allegorically posits the ideologically bound Dr Urbino, whose image remains static and sealed throughout his life, in opposition to the carnivalised grotesque self of Florentino, who is able to learn and change through his openness to the world.

Philosophically, this is of utmost importance for Bakhtin who, as noted by Clark and Holquist, often "model[s] the opposition between ideologies as an opposition between attitudes to the body" (1984: 87). By opposing these ideological attitudes to the body, García Marquez highlights the limitations that the Doctor's subject-centred world-view places on meaning-making, and demonstrates the effectiveness, and the affectiveness, of Florentino's communicative grotesque mode of worldly interaction. As Eagleton points out: "It is important to see, as postmodernism largely does not, that we are not 'cultural' rather than 'natural' creatures, but cultural beings by virtue of our nature, which is to say by virtue of the sorts of bodies we have and the kind of world to which they belong" (1996: 72-3).

The grotesque is, as Dentith explains, "the aesthetic expression of that attitude to life which also underlies the carnival, an attitude founded upon the biological continuity of the body of the people" (1995: 80). It is an aesthetic most clearly expressed in the grotesque image of Florentino, who seeks to diminish the boundaries between the

internal and external, and the self and the other, and enhance the ability for the interlocutors more effectively to access a shared horizon of meaning-making. It is unlike the Cartesian self, whose belief in the *a priori* existence of the mind over the world restricts its ability to affect meaning with the other because it is hermetically sealed and inhibited by its distrust of the world.

Bakhtin, as noted by Clark and Holquist, "does not, as in Romantic philosophy, emphasize the self alone, a radical subjectivity always in danger of shading off into solipsistic extremes" (1984: 65). Rather, by repudiating this distinction between the inner and outer world, the carnivalesque suggests that, given an openness to the other and an ability to interact in the reality of a disordered and fragmented world, the subject can achieve meaning with an other. This grotesque subject's ability to negotiate with this ever-changing world, and achieve meaning, is metaphorically evidenced by Florentino's ability to transform and renew himself. As he says to his Uncle Leo XII, "human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves" (*Love*: 165). This potential to affect change offers the Bakhtinian subject a humanistic chance of forging meaning from disparateness, or love in choleric times.

By comparison, the Doctor's classic philosophical view understands the subject as closed and complete, making the transgression of the other's spatio-temporal horizon and, thus, the possibility of regeneration, difficult. With his privileging of the cerebral and spiritual over the body and world, Urbino is an exemplary representation of the Bakhtinian 'classic' figure. The classic self is hermetically sealed and distinctly separate from the physical world outside, a duality of mind and matter, emphasised by Descartes

(in Russell: 1946: 550), which engenders only social stasis and spiritual reward. It is an image of the body that is, Bakhtin asserts, "torn away from the direct relation to the life of society and to the cosmic whole" (1984: 321), and denies the effect of the body acting on the world and, consequently, its role in informing meaning.

This distinction between the self and other not only severely restricts the possibility of effective communication, but also requires rigid logocentric structures, such as the church and science, to maintain the conditions upon which these discourses are founded. In the novel, the Doctor's life is portrayed as an eighty-year struggle to maintain this closed-ness and resist the grotesque body's insistence on transgressing the boundary between the inner and outer worlds. This attitude to the world is evident in the manner in which he approaches sexual relations, disease and sickness, and orgiastic feasting. All carnival practices which are inhibited or appropriated by Urbino's empiricist or ecclesiastic doctrines.

Contrastingly, the Bakhtinian grotesque subject, by being 'in-the-world', and not outside or above it, proves a subversive force in the novel, over-turning hierarchies and official authority. Indeed, merely by being 'other' to official culture, the grotesque operates, Stallybrass and White note, "as a critique of a dominant ideology" (1986: 43), intent on maintaining its cultural hegemony. Pynchon recognises Florentino's radical role in his review of the novel, suggesting that Garcia Marquez's "resurrection of the body, today as throughout history [is] an unavoidably revolutionary idea" (1988: 47). But, while positing Florentino's subversive potential, the novel also suggests that the individual can achieve an agency that affects the direction of this ever-forming world, by attempting to bridge the dualities highlighted by the Doctor.

In his work on Rabelais, Bakhtin recognises that communication and meaning cannot be restricted merely to language or the utterance. To deny the bodily aspect of being, as the Doctor tries to do, is to deny the seeming obviousness of the body's existence at all. Postmodernism's emphasis on language perpetuates the rationalist tradition of tackling meaning-making through a discourse of reason, and fails to see that the body, as Eagleton notes, like language, "just is a way of acting upon the world, a mode of access to it, a point from which a world is coherently organized" (1996: 12). Garcia Marquez's grotesque portrayal of Florentino provides a model through which the world may be understood, and which affirms and re-emphasises individual agency within society. Bakhtin's reassertion of the corporeal as a valid mode of worldly interaction returns the subject from its distinctly subject-oriented position back into the world where it can act with agency.

The contrast Garcia Marquez makes between the philosophic positions of the protagonists is also apparent in their outward appearance. The Doctor's image, from the time he returns from his studies in Paris, "dressed in perfect alpaca, ... with the beard of a young Pasteur and his hair divided by a neat pale part" (*Love*: 106), suggests a classical completeness. His appearance remains immaculate and unchanging, regardless of occasion, until his death. Indeed, when introduced to the octogenarian doctor in the opening pages, we are told that he dressed "as smartly as he had in his early years", and, with his hair and beard now "the color of mother-of-pearl" (*Love*: 4), this classic image of the Doctor is further entrenched. Garcia Marquez clearly establishes this statue-like fixity, and the importance of Urbino appearing immutable over his lifetime, from very early in the novel.

By comparison, from early childhood until almost the end of his life, Florentino wears the altered clothes of his dead father. Sombre and black, this rather funereal outward facade resists the sense of completeness typified by the Doctor. This image of the young Florentino in the inherited, unfashionable, ill-fitting clothes of his deceased father, strongly symbolises life from death - his emerging life growing up and through the clothes of his deceased father. For Bakhtin, such ambivalence within an image is typically grotesque, reflecting a "conception of the world as eternally unfinished: a world dying and being born at the same time, possessing as it were two bodies" (1984: 166). Similarly, Janus-faced, Florentino looks back at the world of previous generations, while simultaneously looking to the future, sloughing off the past's inhibitive traditions.

This grotesque image is enhanced by Florentino's suffering variously from repeated blennorrhagias, a swollen lymph gland, warts, repeated impetigo of the groin, as well as incidental spells of diarrhoea and vomit that dog his entire life. This penetration of the body's surface, the breaking of skin and bodily protrusions, are all conditions which are characteristically grotesque, symbolically exposing the internal to the world. This openness figures Florentino's philosophical openness to interaction with the other, and the continuity between the individual and the world. And, as a social product, it is this liminal interaction which ensures that the subject is continually affecting the world, and being affected by the world.

This ever-becoming nature of the subject is apparent in the change that occurs in Florentino's character throughout the course of novel. When young and engaged to

Fermina, he is portrayed as a Romantic, who "preferred verse to prose, and in verse he preferred love poems" (*Love*: 75), but he soon throws this epic form over for the more carnivalesque novel. It is a shift that also signals Florentino's shift toward a more physical and direct worldly interaction, a mode through which he gains the durability that his quest requires. This change begins when Florentino is reborn into the carnival outside the church service, and is assured when he is grabbed, presumably, though Florentino is never sure, by Rosalba, who strips him of his virginity on the riverboat trip on which he was sent to forget Fermina. At this point Florentino abandons his Romantic notion of love, for "at the height of pleasure he had experienced a revelation ... his illusory love for Fermina Daza could be replaced by an earthly passion" (*Love*: 143), and replaces this cerebral notion with a carnivalesque, in-the-world interaction.

The grotesque engagement, Bakhtin asserts, "with all its images, indecencies, and curses, affirms the people's immortal, indestructible character" (1984: 255-6), a point recognised by Florentino's mother who, parodying the biblical idea of the humble and meek being especially welcomed in the kingdom of God, tells him that, in the earthly sphere, the "weak would never enter the kingdom of love" (*Love*: 65). And indeed the carnival accords Florentino both a robustness which buttresses his resolution, and a mode of accessing the world which allows him to develop and change.

This new attention to the physical, lower stratum, and Florentino's eagerness to engage with the other, particularly sexually, sees him boasting a prolific catalogue of "some twenty-five notebooks, with six hundred twenty-two entries of long-term liaisons, apart from the countless fleeting adventures that did not even deserve a charitable note" (*Love*: 152). Except for cannibalism, the sexual act offers the most complete

transgression of the other. Bakhtin foregrounds the effect of this grotesque engagement in an early essay:

In the sexual approach, the other's outer body disintegrates and becomes merely a constituent of my own *inner* body, or, in other words, it becomes valuable only in connection with those intracorporeal possibilities (the possibilities of carnal desire, pleasure, gratification) which it promises me, and these inner possibilities submerge and dissolve its resilient outward completeness. (1990: 51).

The distinct outward appearance and separateness of individuals, most prominent in the notion of the classic image, give way to a physical interaction and closeness that dissolve these boundaries.

By contrast, the Doctor represents, in Bakhtinian terms, "an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body .... a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world" (1984: 320). This official persuasion becomes evident upon his return from Paris where, in the tradition of his father, he studied medicine. Having assumed European rationalism comprehensively, we are told that Urbino is "more fastidious than when he left, more in control of his nature" (*Love*: 105), while the society to which he has returned is unlike that which he remembered. This suspicion of the uncontrolled external is evident in Urbino's attitude toward the medication he prescribes: "He thought that, in a strict sense, all medication was poison and that seventy percent of common foods hastened death" (*Love*: 10). His aversion to eating and feasting also betrays a resistance to, what Bakhtin considers, moments of earthly abundance and gay relativity. The classic body's inability to relax control and allow "the world to be swallowed up" (1984: 317), he suggests, reduces the mouth to merely practical usage and transfers meaning "to the private and psychological level where ... [the] connotation becomes

narrow and specific" (1984: 321). This belief, that most foods are poisonous, even more than his aversion to feasting, confirms Urbino's ecclesiastically-based fear of the external world, which he believes to be malignant and to be prevented from entering the body.

This ideological belief in the sanctity of the body becomes even more apparent when Urbino considers "with alarm the vulgarization of surgery. He would say: 'The scalpel is the greatest proof of the failure of medicine'" (*Love*: 10). Urbino here echoes the Catholic prohibitions that, Monas (1990: 58) notes, Rabelais himself faced as a physician in the sixteenth century. Although set over two centuries later, the dictum, '*Ecclesia abhorrent a sanguine*' (*the church abhors blood*), is particularly prevalent in the Doctor's own attitude toward the corporeal. He remains influenced by a notion of the body as God's vessel, destined for the eternal world beyond this earthly existence, and represses the ambivalent reality, both external and internal, that fails to conform to this model. Unable to acknowledge this worldly disorder, he must necessarily repress all that is, what he considers to be, fragmented, discontinuous and absurd.

Free of these discursive pressures, Florentino eagerly transgresses this delineation between the body and the world, as is symbolically evidenced by his eagerness to eat flowers: "he gave in to his desire to eat the gardenias ... so that he could know the taste of Fermina Daza" (*Love*: 65). This grotesque readiness to taste the world, and figuratively to taste the other, symbolises the ultimate transgression of the other, and contrasts markedly with the Doctor's astonishment at finding that his long-time friend, Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, had once "eaten human flesh" (*Love*: 32). Even Fermina is surprised at the extent of her husband's reaction, supposing "that her husband held



Jeremiah de Saint-Amour in esteem not for what he had once been but for what he began to be after he arrived" (*Love*: 32). But the Doctor is acting in the classic mode, expecting Jeremiah to be a complete and static figure, unchanged and unchanging. As his world-view insists, the subject must be scientifically knowable, and/or a soul created and centred by the logos of the church and God.

This attempt to re-dress the privileging of the soul and mind by official culture is further reinforced in the novel by Florentino's "defective vision" (*Love*: 54), which emphasises Garcia Marquez's concern for the subject's bodily presence. In classical terms, the eyes are the windows to the individual soul, and this focus on the spiritual expresses, Bakhtin suggests, "an individual ... self sufficient human life" (1984: 316). Florentino's myopia signals that this will not be the primary point of access for him. Guided, not only by his vision, but by the corporeal and the lower bodily stratum as well, Florentino manifests the Wittgensteinian comment "that the body was the best image we had of the soul" (in Eagleton: 1996: 71); and is in direct contradiction to the classical aesthetic, positing a soul which is internal and located in the upper stratum.

Despite being, we are told, "a good man in bed", Urbino's attitudes to the proclivities of the body and earthly life are notably different from Florentino's. Tempered by the church, the narrator explains that old age offers the Doctor the much appreciated consolation of "sexual peace: the slow, merciful extinction of his venereal appetite" (*Love*: 40). This attitude to the body epitomises his preoccupation with the spiritual and cerebral over the sexual, even within marriage. The description of the newly-wed's first sexual experience is more an anatomy lesson than a sensual encounter:

he took her large, soft hand again and covered it with forlorn little kisses, first the

hard metacarpus, the long, discerning fingers, diaphanous nails, and then the hieroglyphics of her destiny on her perspiring palm. She never knew how her hand came to his chest and felt something it could not decipher. He said: "It is a scapular." (*Love*: 157).

She, similarly, when encountering his penis, begins to categorise and analyse the experience, concluding that it is ugly and over-complicated; an opinion to which he whole-heartedly concurs, and relates how, while studying in Paris, the "original thesis of his dissertation had been just that: the advantage of simplifying the human organism" (*Love*: 158). This approach reduces the phallus to an entirely pragmatic tool, and coincides with the Bakhtinian assertion that the classic canon mentions such body parts at a "merely practical level in brief explanatory comments" (1984: 321).

In the classic image, features such as the "genital organs, the buttocks, belly, nose and mouth cease to play a leading role" (1984: 321), and fail to fulfil the broader symbolic role of rebirth and renewal that they take on in the grotesque figure. Portrayed as largely devoid of these protrusions and orifices, Urbino is typical of the Bakhtinian classic image: "merely one body; no signs of duality have been left" (1984: 321). Impenetrable and complete, his avoidance of grotesque interaction with the external world means he cannot affect or penetrate another, or receive and become pregnant to another, and thus re-produce and give birth to the new. Urbino represents stasis, an unchanging world. The inconceivability of this physical and mental transgression of the spatio-temporal horizon of the other, restricts his ability to effectively relate with others at any other level beyond the intellectual.

The resulting limitations in communication are most notable near Urbino's death: "Only God knows how much I loved you" (*Love*: 43). These last words to his wife of fifty years as he lies prostrate and dying in the mud, debased and uncrowned, demonstrate both the distance that has been maintained between them, and the ideological reason behind this gap in understanding. The Doctor's religious persuasion discourages the activities of the earthly and dictates that real communion can be made only with God. This world-view ensures that he is unable to overcome the physical separateness of the other and communicate effectively, even with Fermina. It is a communication of meaning with the other that, Florentino's actions suggest, can be achieved through the grotesque self.

But the significance of Florentino's and Fermina's reconciliation is not merely the triumph, as the novel's title figures, of achieving love in a time of adversity, where cholera in Spanish, as Pynchon (1988: 47) points out, echoes as much the notion of choler as disease. His success in maintaining this determination and vigour, overcoming both time and the Doctor to fulfil a vow made fifty years earlier, is important, but with regard to the novel's understanding of the self, it is significant that Florentino only succeeds by *changing*. When Fermina finally does "lower the drawbridge for him" (*Love*: 294), she does so only upon the understanding that he is not the Romantic character who courted her as a teenager. This change, from the naive romanticism of his youth, to a more dynamic, earthly figure, 'in-the-world', is evidenced by the soundness of his epistolary advice to Fermina in her bereavement. From the moment she began to read the first letter, "she realized that something had changed in the world" (*Love*: 299). The Florentino whom Fermina encounters fifty years after their initial courtship was:

possessed of a clear-sightedness that in no way corresponded to the feverish love

letters of his youth or to the somber conduct of his entire life [as she knows it]. They were, rather, the words of a man who, in the opinion of Aunt Escolastica, was inspired by the Holy Spirit. (*Love*: 299).

As well as highlighting the change in Florentino, and his new ability to communicate effectively, this comment also implicitly mocks the church. The reader is aware that his spirit has emerged from a grotesque engagement with the carnival and not from the cloistered air of the church. But it also demonstrates the inadequacies and constraints of official discourse as Aunt Escolastica and Fermina struggle to describe their experience within the language of the dominant ideology.

Importantly, Garcia Marquez suggests that Florentino is not only able to change himself, but also acts transitively on the world and others around him. In his letters, Fermina finds "reasons to go on living" and, indeed, believes them to be of "great human value" (*Love*: 298). Eagleton similarly recognises the potential afforded by the physical: "what is special about the human body ... is just its capacity to transform itself in the process of transforming the material bodies around it" (1996: 72). As well as being able to utilise the Bakhtinian surplus vision afforded by being outside of the other, Florentino's grotesque image allows him to access the spatio-temporal horizon of the other and the world with a greater ease than the Doctor. This ability to empathise with the other sees him emerge from the carnival as a subject who, through his ability to communicate, achieves agency.

For Florentino, then, the body is an integral site for change, giving him a robustness and equanimity that see him transcend time and society, and place himself in a position

where he can offer himself once again, transformed, to the widow Urbino. On board the riverboat, *New Fidelity*, with Florentino, Fermina recognises that her husband offered only insecurity and fragility. His "masculine whims, his patriarchal demands, .... [and] the urgent need he felt to find in her the security that seemed to be the mainstay of his public life and that in reality he never possessed" (*Love*: 300), emphasise the extent to which he relied on the discourses of the church and reason to buttress his world-view.

Like Bakhtin, who bemoans official ideology's reduction of communication and meaning-making to the private, individualist psychological level, Garcia Marquez re-introduces the grotesque world-view of Florentino. And, by reasserting the body as a valid mode of interacting with the world for the decentred, socially constructed subject, he redresses the philosophical dominance of subject-centred reason. The Bakhtinian grotesque offers a methodology that explains Florentino's ability to generate, or attempt to generate meaning (though not Meaning or Truth in an absolute or logocentric sense).

Jameson's lament that postmodernism "effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm" (1991: 46), is refuted by Garcia Marquez. His humanistic reassertion of Florentino's ability to make meaning theoretically reaffirms subject agency, and the possibility of once again, as Habermas describes it, becoming "directly implicated in social life-processes insofar as acts of mutual understanding take on the role of a mechanism for coordinating action" (1985: 607). This carnivalesque ability to transcend the binary separateness of the self and the other returns the subject to the 'world' with agency, and is the "counter-strain of 'left-over' humanism" that Buehrer (1990: 16) recognises in *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

This humanism is symbolically figured when Fermina and Florentino are reconciled on the riverboat.

### **Chapter Three - *Love as disease.***

The assertion that meaning is achieved most effectively through a carnivalesque recognition of reality as ambivalent, and through the grotesque body, is symbolically represented in the novel by Florentino's struggle to achieve 'love' with Fermina. The achievement of 'love', often considered an ineffable concept, metaphorically represents a humanistic reassertion of subject agency. Garcia Marquez demonstrates that this potentiality is not achieved by entering into the philosophic discourse of European, subject-centred reason, like the Doctor, but rather through a carnival engagement with, and grotesque openness to, the other and the world. Garcia Marquez completes this philosophical shift back into the 'world' by conflating love with disease and presenting it as a physical, earthly phenomenon. 'Love/disease', then, is clearly an ambivalent image and, as we have seen, ambivalence has a regenerative aspect.

The novel's endorsement of the grotesque, philosophical approach over the Cartesian duality of mind and the world is evidenced by the effectiveness with which Florentino is able to negotiate this ambivalent notion, in contrast with the Doctor's impotence. The Bakhtinian grotesque understanding of the body as a site through which the self interacts with the world, promotes a decentred openness to the external, and this "decentred openness to the reality of others," Eagleton suggests, affords the subject an objectivity which is affective. And this objectivity is "in its more affective reaches closely linked with love. The fact that this is probably in any full sense impossible should not deter us from trying it on" (1996: 123). And Florentino does 'try it on'. Betraying none of the existential uncertainty or alienation evident in Urbino, who is run through with the discursive narratives of history, tradition, church and science, Florentino achieves 'love'

with Fermina some fifty years after she spurns their initial engagement. It is a half century in which Fermina's marriage with the Doctor is shown to be largely empty and tedious.

While obviously Florentino's fidelity can hardly be considered abstemious, his determination, nevertheless, does remain true for some fifty years, and is seemingly a triumph of the heart. If we accept, then, Hassan's tentative suggestion that postmodernism is "hospitable to kitsch" (1987: 151), Florentino's story, written and published in the last quarter of an apocalyptic twentieth century, would seemingly qualify. Except that this postmodern 'kitsch-ness' depends on a notion of love as Romantic, a notion which Garcia Marquez readdresses in the novel by linking love and disease, and returning it to the world where it can once again be achieved.

From the outset of Florentino's encounter with Fermina, the emotion of love manifests itself, not only spiritually and mentally, but physically and corporeally. When Fermina first becomes aware of Florentino's presence in the park, where he watches her each day on her way to school, "it seemed to her that he was sick" (*Love*: 58), but her Aunt notes that he "could only be sick with love" (*Love*: 58). This first connection between love and disease, notions that become almost synonymic in the novel, becomes more overt upon their first personal meeting:

he lost his voice and his appetite and spent the entire night tossing and turning in his bed. But when he began to wait for the answer to his first letter, his anguish was complicated by diarrhea and vomit, he became disoriented and suffered from sudden fainting spells, and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera. (*Love*: 61).



The Doctor, too, despite being the embodiment of Cartesian reason, also highlights this thematic connection by treating love as he treats disease. Where Florentino revels in the sickness of love and carries the scars as if they are "the spoils of war" (*Love*: 219), the Doctor "liked to say that this love was the result of a clinical error" (*Love*: 105). It is a condition that he attempts to repress by employing methods similar to those he uses so effectively to fight cholera. And, while these sanitary improvements that he imposes ensure the Doctor's success at preventing disease, they also ensure that love is reduced to a hygienic note, the tone of which is set by the particularly clinical consummation of their marriage *en route* to Paris. Due its sinful connotations, Urbino is unable freely to appreciate love as a physical, sexual interaction with the other. Consequently, it can remain only a Romantic concept, empirically unverifiable and unattainable.

Urbino's distrust of the world, and his faith in a heavenly after-life, means that he must fight love's venereal insinuations in an attempt to detach himself from the earthly urges of the 'lower realm'. When the Doctor does succumb to temptation, his brief, albeit pathetic, affair with Barbara Lynch only confirms the difficulty of repressing the corporeal aspect of love, and demonstrates that such a denial severely restricts effective engagement with the other. Urbino is, as Bakhtin describes, "the closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and the world" (1984: 320), and effective communication or meaning for such a closed individuality is difficult, and especially so with Barbara, who, female, poor and black, is perhaps his complete other:

he squandered everything she did to make him happy. Panting and drenched with perspiration, he rushed after her into the bedroom, throwing everything on the floor, his walking stick, his medical bag, his Panama hat, and he made panic-

stricken love with his trousers down around his knees, with his jacket buttoned so that it would not get in his way, with his gold watch chain against his vest, with his shoes on, with everything on, and more concerned with leaving as soon as possible than with achieving pleasure. She was left dangling, barely at the entrance of her tunnel of solitude, while he was already buttoning up again... (*Love*: 245-6).

The bourgeois linking of sexuality and disease with filth and the lower classes, noted above, is particularly evident here in the Doctor's lack of regard for Barbara. The affair ends, as McNiff and Burrell point out, with Urbino realising that he can "only fight disease and not celebrate the healthiness he had fought so hard for" (1990-1: 57). Fermina's discovery of the affair sees Urbino's vows of eternal love and promises of time together abandoned, as he buys Barbara off with an emerald tiara that is delivered, without a note, by his footman. His lifetime, spent protecting the sanctity of the body by fighting disease simultaneously, ensures that he is also unable to contract or convey love. Urbino is the isolated Dasein, heroically projecting himself against a situation. He is able to relate to the other only through the medium of the mind, and is therefore bound to fight disease/love whereas Florentino actively and bodily engages with it.

Despite Florentino's flagrant disregard for ecclesiastical dictates of the church and the paucity of his religious faith, it is ironically he who is rewarded with a spiritual air. On several occasions the narrator notes an "overwhelming impression that Florentino Ariza was speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (*Love*: 66). Again, when Florentino is warned by Fermina's father to stay away from his daughter, "his intestines filling with cold froth. But his voice did not tremble because he felt himself illuminated

by the Holy Spirit" (*Love*: 82). By linking the bowels with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Garcia Marquez shifts the spiritual to the physical and the lower stratum, and undermines the church's sovereignty. This overturning also mocks the faithful (such as Fermina's pious Aunt), who understand his grace to be cosmically inspired, and endorses the earthiness with which Garcia Marquez links it.

This association of the Holy Spirit with the bowels is particularly significant given that, for Bakhtin, excrement is the ultimate "gay matter". With its "relation to regeneration and renewal and its special role in overcoming fear", it is an ambivalent image that "is also an intermediate between the living body and dead disintegrating matter that is being transformed into earth" (1984: 175). The positive nature of this excremental connection becomes most overt during Florentino's first personal appointment with Fermina since she was widowed. Only moments after their greetings, the visit is quickly aborted when Florentino recognises the familiar "twisting in his guts like the coil of a spring" (*Love*: 304). Despite the maid's frightened reaction to the deathly aspect of his "corpse's face", Florentino's sickness is not a terminal condition; indeed, it is regenerative. Back in the car, after hurried apologies for his departure, he "shifted into a less painful position in the back seat, closed his eyes, relaxed his muscles, and surrendered to the will of his body. It was like being *reborn*" (*Love*: 305: my italics). The driver's inadvertently accurate remark, that his symptoms "look like cholera", again demonstrates the connection between love and disease, but, as the narrator recognises, this event is positive; Florentino is 'reborn'.

Garcia Marquez repeatedly presents images of dualism through the novel and demonstrates the consequences of their respective attempts to negotiate these situations.

During the Doctor's frantic affair with Barbara Lynch, he believes he had "made absolute love on the dividing line between life and death" (*Love*: 246). While implicitly mocking the Doctor's claim, the narrator nevertheless acknowledges the ambivalent proximity of extreme love and death. Florentino's engagement with this ambivalence can be measured by the fact that, while he survives, albeit bearing the scars of battle, he is indirectly responsible for the death of two of his lovers: Olimpia Zuleta, murdered by her husband upon discovering her infidelity (*Love*: 217), and America Vicuna, who poisons herself with laudanum (*Love*: 336). Significantly, as Martinez-Maldonado notes, laudanum was "one of the erroneous but popular and widespread nineteenth-century remedies for cholera" (1990: 136).

For Bakhtin, the positive aspect of this ambivalent proximity of procreation and death is reminiscent of Bataille's understanding of the role that death plays in eroticism: "Life is always a product of the decomposition of life" (1962: 49). It is a notion echoed by Florentino and Fermina late in the novel, when they suggest that "love was always love, ... but it was more solid the closer it came to death" (*Love*: 345). The creation and achievement of love is increasingly tangible the more it openly acknowledges its inherent other, death. Too constrained by cosmic fear to approach this ambivalence, the Doctor is unable to merge and access this space between life and death and, consequently, he also fails to access its regenerative aspect.

Urbino's world-view and mode of interaction are shown, in the novel, to be hollow and inadequate. This position is confirmed when, as the central event of the opening chapter, he dies an absurd death after falling from a ladder, in his suspenders, while chasing his escaped parrot up a tree. This typically carnivalesque debasement is further

reinforced when the recalcitrant bird, still at large and perched above the prostrate figure of the muddled Doctor, mockingly mimics his master's voice and calls out incisively: "You're even more of a scoundrel, Doctor" (*Love*: 41). Given that the parrot escapes because the Doctor has forgotten to clip its wings, the event is of some pertinence as it exposes official culture's reliance on force to maintain its dominance over 'nature' and the 'irrational', as well as the potential for, and the ramifications of a rupture within such rigid ideology.

Parodying the church's celebration of the Holy Spirit's descent to earth, Urbino's fall on Pentecost Sunday, without communion and hence spiritually unprepared, mocks official culture's piety and seriousness, and undermines the authority of the world-view it imposes. By presenting this farcical debasement at the beginning of the novel when, chronologically, it belongs closer to the end, Garcia Marquez ensures that the event informs our understanding of the Doctor from the outset. Despite a fifty-year marriage and considerable social achievements, the prominence of the Doctor's uncrowning suggests that the novel's vision for society, as it moves into the twentieth century, is not founded in the rigidity and anachronisms of a sepulchral aristocracy intent on maintaining hierarchies and class distinctions. The moribundity of this way of life is symbolised by the Doctor's own widowed mother, who, "smothered by mourning that was considered eternal, had substituted evening novenas for her dead husband's celebrated lyrical soirees and chamber concerts" (*Love*: 107). Confined by the rigid conventions of the aristocratic society to which she and her son belong, she is unable to be reborn, to find regeneration from death.

Rather, this stagnation is thrown into stark relief by the vigour that the widows of

Florentino's adventures enjoy, from "pleading to be buried alive in the same coffin ... [he] had seen them rise up from the ashes with renewed vitality" (*Love*: 202). Grateful for their liberation through death from the constraints of a patriarchal situation, they emerge into a new life, free of the stigma and conventions of official and religious society. Florentino, aware of the life-giving effect of death, is "convinced that a disconsolate widow, more than any other woman, might carry within her the seed of happiness" (*Love*: 203).

This seed of human potential cannot, as Urbino's mother demonstrates, easily exist within the grim strictures of official society, necessarily rigid to maintain the *Gestalt* against the ever-upsurging culture of the streets and market-place. As he looks at the photographs of the city's street children, taken by his friend Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, the narrator comments that the Doctor "often thought with a shudder of sorrow that in the gallery of casual portraits lay the germ of the future city, governed and corrupted by those unknown children, where not even the ashes of his glory would remain" (*Love*: 6). Constrained by the discourses by which he is constituted, he can only acknowledge the negative aspect of the image, 'germ'. He cannot see the aspect of potential new life, let alone its association with love, that we have traced here. His implicit contempt demonstrates the obvious difficulties Urbino has in empathising, and therefore communicating with, the 'lower' classes, as well as exposing the real motivation behind his noble actions, that is, his desire for lasting 'glory'. But this typically official desire for fixity and stasis is again undermined by Garcia Marquez when, upon his death, the Doctor's face is so contorted by the "terror" of his fall that a death mask is not made. It being considered that such a rendering of the celebrated Doctor would not be "decent" (*Love*: 45). Even the posthumous, officially commissioned portrait commemorating his

death is publicly burned by students in the university plaza as a symbolic protest against "an aesthetic and time they despised" (*Love*: 46). This mockery of the Doctor's pomposity positions the reader to view him, and all that he represents, as slightly ridiculous.

Florentino's understanding of the world's ambivalence, and his ability to recognise the seed, or germ, of human possibilities, are apparent when he restates his declaration of love to Fermina on the first night of her widowhood. Also symbolic is Fermina's wearing, at the time of her husband's death, what appears to be "the dress of a newly-wed grandmother" (*Love*: 276). This ambivalent, particularly grotesque, image of death and new-life suggests that she, unlike her mother-in-law, will not wither away in widowhood boredom, but will fulfil her latent potential and desire for renewal. Freed of the static emptiness of her socially prescribed roles, she asserts: "If we widows have any advantage, it is that there is no one left to give us orders" (*Love*: 324). This potential, liberated by the death of Urbino, sees her ultimately accepting Florentino's invitation to join him on a riverboat cruise. Reborn into the world, she can again begin to dream of the future: "other voyages with Florentino Ariza appeared on the horizon: mad voyages, free of trunks, free of social commitments: voyages of love" (*Love*: 345).

'Love' acts in the novel, then, as the agent that exposes the inadequacies of the Doctor's subject-centred reason. As Besley describes, desire or love is "a state of mind which is also a state of body, or which perhaps deconstructs the two, throwing into relief in the process the inadequacy of a Western tradition that divides human beings along an axis crossed daily by this most familiar of emotions" (1994: 3). Besley here highlights both the social nature of love, and the inadequacies of an understanding of the individual as

isolated and separate from the other. The inadequacies of this subject-centred world-view are evident in the Doctor's relations with Fermina. Despite being officially sanctioned within the conventions of marriage, a renegotiation of the relationship between the impurity of earthly life and the spiritual perfection of the after-life, is inconceivable for the Doctor. Subsequently, Fermina, despite an improbable, socially upward marriage, will look back over her life and suggest that married life is about "learning to overcome boredom" (*Love*: 211):

She could not conceive of a husband better than hers had been, and yet when she recalled their life she found more difficulties than pleasures, too many misunderstandings, useless arguments, unresolved angers. Suddenly she sighed: "it is incredible how one can be happy for so many years in the midst of so many squabbles, so many problems, damn it, and not really know if it was love or not." (*Love*: 329).

Similarly, while postmodernism, as Besley points out, serves an important critical, deconstructive function, it is unable to explain how these binary oppositions are nevertheless bridged. Indeed, the narrator notes in the novel, and it is hard not to see Garcia Marquez here having a gentle poke at the theorists of postmodernism, that "after all, everyone knew that the time of cholera had not ended despite all the joyful statistics from the health officials" (*Love*: 343). Bakhtin, as Holquist says in his introduction to Bakhtin's *Art and Answerability*, asserts that social interaction is, at the very least, triadic rather than dyadic: "a dialogue is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two" (1990: 38). Unlike the Doctor, who maintains these distinctions, Florentino enthusiastically interacts with the other, and the love he achieves with Fermina represents this third element of the meaning-making horizon, the relation



between the two.

Meaning, symbolised by the ability of individuals to achieve love/disease within the ambivalence of the social, has always and continually been made, despite theorists' assertions to the contrary. All that has been lacking is the language and political theory to explain this reality. By reasserting the external and the corporeal into the discussion, and emphasising love's social nature, Garcia Marquez obviates the need for Florentino to grasp a metaphysical Romantic 'love' - emotional, intellectual and intangible - and highlights that it is through tangible action, as well as through language, that a subject may achieve this emotion. Garcia Marquez signals these new possibilities in Fermina's relationship with Florentino.

Finally free of the discursive shackles imposed by her husband's official culture, Fermina re-joins Florentino on a riverboat cruise, consummating their relationship on board the, fittingly named, *New Fidelity*. As she waves goodbye to a sheepish Dr Urbino Jr, Fermina symbolically abandons a 'subject-centred' world-view that could lead only to meaningless and cultural anaesthesia. Instead, after a fifty-year flirtation with European reason, she returns to Florentino, who has disregarded this mode and moved on the path of 'communicative' reasoning. His grotesque and dialogic interaction with the world recognises the ability to achieve meaning amidst this uncertainty, and offers Fermina the love and meaning Urbino failed to give her. Indeed, by the end of the cruise, Florentino and Fermina are reluctant to return to official society where love is so difficult to effect, and their desire to remain on the boat is achieved when they convince the authorities that there is a case of cholera on board which, within the metaphor traced here, is accurate.

Their reconciliation is not, however, unequivocal. McNiff and Burrell's contention that love "is a disease contracted in adolescence, advanced in adulthood, and conquered in old age" (1990-1: 51), ignores the fact that, while the physical aspect of their relationship eventually transcends their initial awkwardness, the utopia to which Florentino expected to deliver Fermina has been denuded and now stands devoid of its past fecundity. And that this apocalyptic devastation was, in fact, wrought by Florentino's own riverboat company. But even this apparent complication of our allegory is itself countered by the return of a female manatee to the river. Considered for some time to be extinct from the Magdalena's waters, the "enormous matron nursing the baby she held in her arms" (*Love*: 344) is a fecund image with which to close the novel. In seeming confirmation of this, Florentino suggests that, although the river's navigability is rapidly diminishing, due to the silting that resulted from the destruction of the surrounding forests, the decreasing viability of riverboats would soon be replaced by the road and automobile. While this is hardly an ecological alternative, or consolation to those relying on the river, it nevertheless reiterates the carnival notion that death brings the new.

Florentino's success, then, is certainly not a triumph of Romanticism, as McNerney suggests (in McNiff & Burrell: 1990-1: 57), or a humanistic essentialism. This interpretation not only ignores the marked change between the approach of the adolescent Florentino and the Florentino who appears at (and in) Urbino's wake to restate his vow, but also fails to understand the correlation between love and disease that the novel makes. Through the reification of love, Garcia Marquez dissolves the distinctions between the spiritual and physical, the Romantic and the grotesque, and

ensures that love cannot be mistaken for a purely essential or cerebral notion, but can be achieved only at a socially interactive and bodily level. Florentino does, then, as Eagleton suggests, 'try it on', achieving love where this concept is brought back into the world.

The Bakhtinian architectonic offers, then, an alternative to the impotence and inevitablism offered by the world-view of official culture. While recognising the subversive nature of the ever-becoming, discontinuous reality rising from the marketplace and the streets of the old quarter, it also promotes an encompassing ambivalence that has an inherently positive, humanistic value for the subject. Fermina and Florentino's journey upon the *New Fidelity*, as the name suggests, manifests this re-recognition of the subject's ability to bridge the dualities that frighten the increasingly individualistic and subjectivist society from which they escape. Their love, like Bakhtin's understanding of how meaning is made, has to be worked for rather than won. Meaning is never completely unambiguous or conquered in a complete sense. As we have noted, wholes are never given, but achieved, and this is what Garcia Marquez demonstrates in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a new understanding of humanism that is not *given*, but *achieved*.

## Conclusion

This thesis attempts to expose the inherent problems in viewing Garcia Marquez as an archetypal postmodern writer and, by so doing, to explain postmodernism's inability to understand the world and the ways in which meaning is made. Garcia Marquez demonstrates these inadequacies by contrasting the difficulties faced by Urbino, with Florentino's ability to ultimately achieve meaning within these same conditions by adopting a more Bakhtinian carnivalesque mode.

In its resemblance to the Saussurean model of language, Bakhtin's architectonic has significant ramifications for contemporary theory. Whilst recognising the binary nature of the world, Bakhtin is nevertheless able to explain how understanding is achieved. It is an architectonic that explains communication and meaning-making at the most basic level, an utterance between interlocutors, as well as explaining how this translates to a broader understanding of society and the world. At a time when humanism is, at the very least, unfashionable, Bakhtin asserts the possibility of theoretically demonstrating how meaning is made within this disparate world.

With its somewhat over-enthusiastic endorsement of folk culture, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* is often dismissed as a somewhat trendy piece of literary theory, lacking theoretical rigour and applicability beyond Rabelais. His sometimes simplistic enthusiasm for folk culture can largely be explained by the political circumstances and atmosphere in which he wrote (refer Clark & Holquist: 1984), however, Bakhtin's work has considerable significance beyond a study of carnival rites and practices. Critics have failed to see, partly due to delays in translation, the implicit theory of dialogism

that under-pins the carnivalesque and Bakhtin's other writings. Subsequently, that work which did become available, was often read and used, like Kristeva's use of heteroglossia for her work on intertextuality, in isolation of his broader *oeuvre*, and fails to recognise Bakhtin's continual attempts to explain how binaries are bridged and meaning achieved. With this underlying goal in mind, *Rabelais and His World* is particularly significant, as it is in this work that Bakhtin demonstrates how dialogism works at a social level, accommodating the various voices and perspectives that form the nature of 'reality'.

Bakhtin's carnivalesque also highlights the illusions of a philosophy that ignores the 'world', and focuses only on the mind or reason. Restricted within the discourses of this upper realm, the individual is required to achieve such improbable absolutes as Romantic love, which Bakhtin, like postmodernism, demonstrates is fallacious. Bakhtin's humanism lies in his returning of such notions as love back into the world, where they can once again be achieved. Garcia Marquez achieves this in the novel by directly linking love with disease, bringing love back to the earthly where it can be achieved by Florentino and Fermina.

This thesis does not contend, then, that Garcia Marquez or Bakhtin reject the premises of postmodernism completely. Bakhtin would agree, for instance, that the 'world' is not ordered, historically linear, or vertically organised by metaphysical truth, because reality is ever-becoming. And, this understanding of the world as fragmentary and decentred is apparent in Garcia Marquez's novel. But, this thesis illustrates that this view is only one aspect, or one voice, within the many conflicting and dialogic discourses within society. Postmodernism, in its call to play (Hassan: 1987: 90), largely fails to acknowledge that

meaning is nevertheless made.

Postmodernism's debilitating impotence is the logical extension of a particular philosophical approach that, limited by its own subject-centred discourse, is unable to recognise that meaning is achieved in the world. Its propensity to employ the very subjectivity it so often attacks means that it fails to recognise how slippage in meaning is limited by language being inherently an interactive dialogic notion, circumscribed within a social context. Infinite deferral, as explored by Derrida, is halted from its theoretically extrapolated descent into absurdity. Consequently, the subject can again take its place with agency in this meaningless world.

This failure to see its own limitations has seen postmodernism become a culture almost as monologic as those narratives it displaced and deconstructed. This subject-centred inability to recognise other modes of interaction with the world concurs with Stallybrass and White's assertion regarding the high-mindedness of the culture of reason: "It is indeed one of the most powerful ruses of the dominant to pretend that critique can only exist in the language of 'reason', 'pure knowledge' and 'seriousness'" (1986: 43). It is a ruse that, I suggest, postmodernism perpetuates, despite its playfulness, and which Bakhtinian thought, by re-introducing addressivity, and the role of the external world, redefines.

García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, then, reflects Bakhtin's architectonic. Read through the organising topos of dialogism and the carnivalesque, the novel demonstrates an inclusive aesthetic model, capable of explaining the heteroglossic nature of contemporary society, as well as demonstrating how meaning is still achieved.

It reasserts an agency for the de-centred subject which is contrary to much of contemporary theory's understanding of the capabilities of the individual in society.

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